

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-110-2005- 98 -EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT NAME: Little Rancho/13 Mile Pit Reservoirs

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T 2S R 94W
Sec 18 NWSE, SWSE, SESW
T 2S R 95W
Sec 22 SWSW
Sec 28 NWNE, NENW
Sec 29 NENE NWSE, NESW

APPLICANT: Cross Slash Four Ranch

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Proposed Action: The proposed action is for the construction of 9 small pit reservoirs 250 to 500 cubic yards in size by private contract or Force Account on the Little Rancho (06010) and Thirteenmile (06011) allotments. The reservoirs would be constructed in late July or August of 2005. The reservoirs will be built using a small caterpillar tractor, D-3, 4 equivalent. The reservoirs will be livestock water/erosion control structures located immediately adjacent to existing roads. The proposed structures will capture water and silt off the adjacent roads. All areas of earthen disturbance will be revegetated with Native Seed mix #6 following construction.

Native Seed Mix #6		
Species (Variety)	Lbs. PLS per Acre	Ecological Sites
Bluebunch wheatgrass (Secar)	2	Alpine Meadow, Alpine Slopes, Aspen
Slender wheatgrass (Primar)	2	Woodlands, Brushy Loam, Deep clay Loam,
Big Bluegrass (Sherman)	1	Douglas-fir Woodland, Loamy Park,
Canby bluegrass (Canbar)	1	Mountain Loam, Mountain Meadows,
Mountain brome (Bromar)	2	Mountain Swale, Shallow Subalpine, Spruce-
Alternates: Blue flax ^{1/} , rocky Mountain penstemon ^{2/} , balsamroot		fir Woodland, Subalpine Loam

^{1/}Appar

^{2/}Bandera

No Action Alternative: The reservoir construction would not be authorized; there would not be any surface disturbance.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD: None

NEED FOR THE ACTION: Cross Slash Four Ranch has requested authorization to construct nine small reservoirs to collect summer thunderstorm runoff from roads and control erosion. Such structures have in the past proven to be effective both in improving livestock distribution and in controlling erosion.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: Livestock Grazing, Range Improvements, p 2-25

Decision Language: Range improvements are necessary to control livestock use and improve rangeland condition.

**AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES /
MITIGATION MEASURES:**

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: The proposed actions are not located within a ten mile radius of any special designation air sheds or non-attainment areas. Construction of the pit reservoirs will have little effect on air quality in the area with exception to dry periods when gusty winds may temporarily increase fugitive dust levels. Overall, construction operations should not greatly

compromise National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for particulate matter which calls for a maximum 24-hour average to be less than or equal to 150 µg/m³.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Removal of ground cover will leave soils exposed to eolian processes until mitigation is complete. Elevated levels of fugitive dust would result with strong winds during dry periods. However, airborne particulate matter should not exceed Colorado air quality standards on an hourly or daily basis.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: There are no recorded sites on or near the proposed development areas. A Class III pedestrian survey of approximately 1000 ft surrounding the proposed pond areas uncovered no evidence of cultural resource materials.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The ponds are located along side an already existing road minimizing disturbance and the likelihood of uncovering cultural materials.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None.

Mitigation: The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

2. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: The proposed project area has no known noxious or invasive species. Houndstongue and musk thistle have been found in as spot infestations within a mile of the project sites.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will create areas of earthen disturbance which will provide safe sites for the establishment of noxious and invasive species if they are not promptly revegetated and monitored. The likelihood of this occurring will be low if the suggested mitigation is applied.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: Monitor project sites for a minimum of five years post disturbance to insure that no noxious weeds or invasive species establish on site

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The habitat surrounding the six reservoirs associated with the Little Rancho allotment is comprised largely of mountain shrub species such as Utah serviceberry, Gambel's oak and mountain big sagebrush with a mix of herbaceous understory. Green-tailed towhee, spotted towhee, dusky flycatcher and orange-crowned warbler are species commonly associated with this habitat type. Species of concern include Virginia's warbler and common poorwill.

Vegetation surrounding the three reservoirs located on the Thirteenmile allotment is dominated by mountain big sagebrush with mixed forb and herbaceous understory. Brewer's sparrow is the only species of concern associated with this habitat type.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would disturb approximately .45 acres of habitat immediately adjacent to existing roadways. Functionally, habitats adjacent to roads typically support low numbers of breeding birds. The small amount of disturbance associated with this project (<.5 acres) coupled with the time of year work is scheduled (post-breeding season) would preclude any conceivable negative impacts to migratory birds.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no affect on migratory birds or their habitats under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: It is recommended that any earthwork associated with this project begin after 15 July to avoid the migratory bird breeding season.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no threatened, endangered and sensitive animal species that inhabit or derive important use from the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on special status animals or associated habitat.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no conceivable influence on special status animals or associated habitat under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: The proposed action would have no effective influence on populations or habitat associated with special status species.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored or disposed of at sites included in the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project. While commercial preparations of fuels and lubricants proposed for use may contain some hazardous constituents, they would be stored, used and transported in a manner consistent with applicable laws, and the generation of hazardous wastes would not be anticipated.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No hazardous or other solid wastes would be generated under the no-action alternative.

Mitigation: The applicant shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the proposed actions.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: Surface Water: The proposed pit reservoirs are located in the Dry Fork Piceance Creek and Dry Thirteenmile Creek watersheds. Both of these catchment areas are tributaries to Piceance Creek and have been placed in stream segment 16 of the White River Basin. A review of the Colorado's 1989 Nonpoint Source Assessment Report (plus updates), the 305(b) report, the 303(d) list and the Unified Watershed Assessment was done to see if any water quality concerns have been identified. The State has classified stream segment 16 of the White River Basin as "Use Protected" and further designated as beneficial for the following uses: Warm Aquatic Life 2, Recreation 2, and Agriculture. The antidegradation review requirements in the Antidegradation Rule are not applicable to waters designated use-protected. For those waters, only the protection specified in each reach will apply. For this reach, minimum standards for four parameters have been listed. These parameters are: dissolved oxygen = 5.0 mg/l, pH = 6.5 - 9.0, Fecal Coliform = 2000/100 ml, and 630/100 ml E. coli.

Ground Water: The proposed pit reservoirs are all located in an area of ground water recharge (high in the drainage basin). No adverse impacts to ground water are anticipated due to construction.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Surface disturbance will exposes soils to erosional processes and potentially increase sediment loads to downstream reaches.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: During an on-site evaluation, it was noted that pit locations #5 and #8 would be marginally functional. In attempts to minimize surface disturbances, it is recommended that pit locations #5 and #8 not be developed.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: Water quality in stream segment 16 currently meets water quality standards set by the state. The proposed pit reservoirs affect very little drainage area and pose no serious threat to water quality and would continue to meet the state water quality standards.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: There are no wetlands or riparian areas at the proposed pit sites.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: On a watershed basis, the proposed projects should act to enhance wetland/riparian conditions through their impact in reducing erosion and in improving livestock distribution on the uplands.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: Riparian areas in the general landscape currently meet the Standard and the proposed action can be expected to enhance their ability to do so in the future.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:

No ACEC's, flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, Wilderness, or Wild and Scenic Rivers, threatened, endangered or sensitive plants exist within the area affected by the proposed action. For threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species Public Land Health Standard is not applicable since neither the proposed nor the no-action alternative would have any influence on populations of, or habitats potentially occupied by, special status plants. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: Soils at the three sites in Summer Camp Gulch are in the Shawa loam map unit. These are deep, well drained loams and clay loams formed in alluvium. The ecological site is Deep loam. Soils at the remaining sites are in the Irigul-Parachute complex. These soils are shallow to moderately deep loams and channery loams formed in residuum from sandstone and shale parent material. The ecological site is Loamy slopes.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: There will be no more than .05 acres soil disturbance per site for a total disturbance of .45 acres. This disturbance could provide sites for the establishment of noxious and invasive species if the proposed mitigation is not applied.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: See Vegetation mitigation.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: Soils in the project area currently meet the Standard and it is expected that implementation of this action would facilitate their ability to meet the Standard in the future.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Vegetation at the Summer Camp pit sites (#7- #9) is dominated by a scattered stand of mountain big sagebrush with a diverse understory of grasses and forbs. Vegetation at the sites around the Dry Fork divide (#1- #6) is mixed mountain big sagebrush/Utah serviceberry/scattered mottes of Gambel oak with a diverse herbaceous understory.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will disturb no more than .45 acres of vegetation. This short term disturbance will be offset by a long term watershed wide benefit as a result of erosion control and improved patterns of livestock distribution.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: Promptly revegetate all disturbed areas with Native Seed mix # 6 and monitor the project site(s) for a minimum of 5 years post disturbance to insure that no noxious or invasive species establish on site.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Plant communities in are of the proposed action meet the Standard. The proposed projects should facilitate meeting the Standard in the future.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: There are no aquatic habitats directly involved or potentially affected by the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on aquatic wildlife or habitats.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The no-action alternative would not have any conceivable influence on aquatic wildlife or habitats.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): This project would have no conceivable potential for influencing aquatic wildlife or habitats addressed in the Standards.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Vegetation associated with the Little Rancho and Thirteenmile allotments are comprised of mountain shrub species (Utah serviceberry, mountain big sagebrush and Gambel's oak) and mountain big sagebrush, respectively. Both areas are used throughout the year by big game with heavier use during the fall/early winter and spring. There is no suitable nesting substrate available for raptors in the vicinity of the Little Rancho allotment. Aspen woodlands located in the vicinity of the Thirteenmile allotment may potentially provide nesting substrate for raptors such as red-tailed hawks.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will involve the disturbance/removal of .45 acres of mountain big sage and serviceberry, a negligible amount compared to the total forage base available for big game. Furthermore, all sites are located immediately adjacent to existing roads. These areas typically are not heavily used by big game, particularly during fall/early winter (hunting season). Similarly, the loss of forage and cover for non-game animals would be negligible at the local scale. Reclamation of these sites would make available more herbaceous understory to big game during the spring months. There would be no negative impacts on nesting raptors as earthwork for the project is scheduled to begin after the nesting season. Construction of these reservoirs will likely improve livestock distribution throughout the allotment.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no conceivable influence on wildlife or associated habitat(s) under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: Earthwork associated with the project should begin after 15 July to avoid any disturbance to nesting raptors. It is recommended that earthwork associated with the Little Rancho allotment be initiated prior to the Thirteenmile allotment, as this site holds the greatest raptor nesting potential.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): This project should have no conceivable influence on the condition or function of terrestrial habitats or wildlife associated with these habitats and therefore, would have no influence on continued maintenance of associated land health standards.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation		X	
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management	X		
Forest Management	X		
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights		X	

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Law Enforcement		X	
Noise		X	
Paleontology	X		
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations	X		
Recreation		X	
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses	X		

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: From the proposed action: pit sites 7-9 are within the Little Rancho allotment (06010) and sites 1-6 are within the Thirteenmile allotment (06011). Both allotments are licensed for summer and fall grazing use. For the past several years the permittee has been using the Thirteenmile allotment through early August and then moving his cattle onto Little Rancho allotment and private lands contiguous to it.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed pits will provide watering sites for cattle at locations presently only lightly used by cattle during the summer. The resulting improvement in distribution will positively affect plant cover and production on both allotments.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: No additional mitigation is necessary.

VISUAL RESOURCE

Affected Environment: The proposed action is within a VRM class III area. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is small in scale relative to the surrounding landscape; therefore, any modifications will be unseen to the casual observer, and VRM III objectives will be met. Furthermore, any disturbed vegetation will return making the action virtually unnoticeable within a period of a few years.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No impact on visual resources.

Mitigation: To retain the existing character of the landscape, remove as little vegetation as possible during construction.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: This project would improve vegetation composition and cover, benefiting the soil, water and vegetation resources and the animals' dependant on these resources.

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED: None

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Nate Dieterich	Hydrologist	Air Quality
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Gabrielle Elliott	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species; Soils, Vegetation, Rangeland Management, Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Bo Brown	Hazmat Collateral	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Nate Dieterich	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access and Transportation
Ken Holsinger	Natural Resource Specialist	Fire Management
Robert Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Penny Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources

Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE: The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION/RATIONALE: It is my decision to construct seven of the nine Little Rancho/13 Mile pit reservoirs proposed. Their construction will foster improved livestock distribution on the affected allotments, resulting in a net beneficial impact on the environment. Pit locations #5 and #8 will not be authorized to be constructed.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

1. Monitor project sites for a minimum of five years post disturbance to insure that no noxious weeds or invasive species establish on site
2. It is recommended that any earthwork associated with this project begin after 15 July to avoid the migratory bird breeding season and nesting raptors.
3. The applicant shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the proposed actions.
4. During an on-site evaluation, it was noted that pit locations #5 and #8 would be marginally functional. In attempts to minimize surface disturbances, it is recommended that pit locations #5 and #8 not be developed.
5. It is recommended that earthwork associated with the Little Rancho allotment be initiated prior to the Thirteenmile allotment, as this site holds the greatest raptor nesting potential.
6. To retain the existing character of the landscape, remove as little vegetation as possible during construction.
7. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and

immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

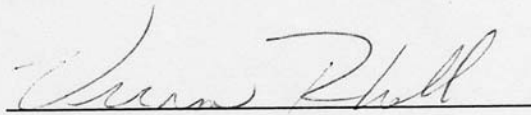
8. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: Will be preformed by the range staff for a minimum of 5 years after the reservoirs are constructed.

NAME OF PREPARER: Mark Hafkenschiel

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Caroline Hollowed

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



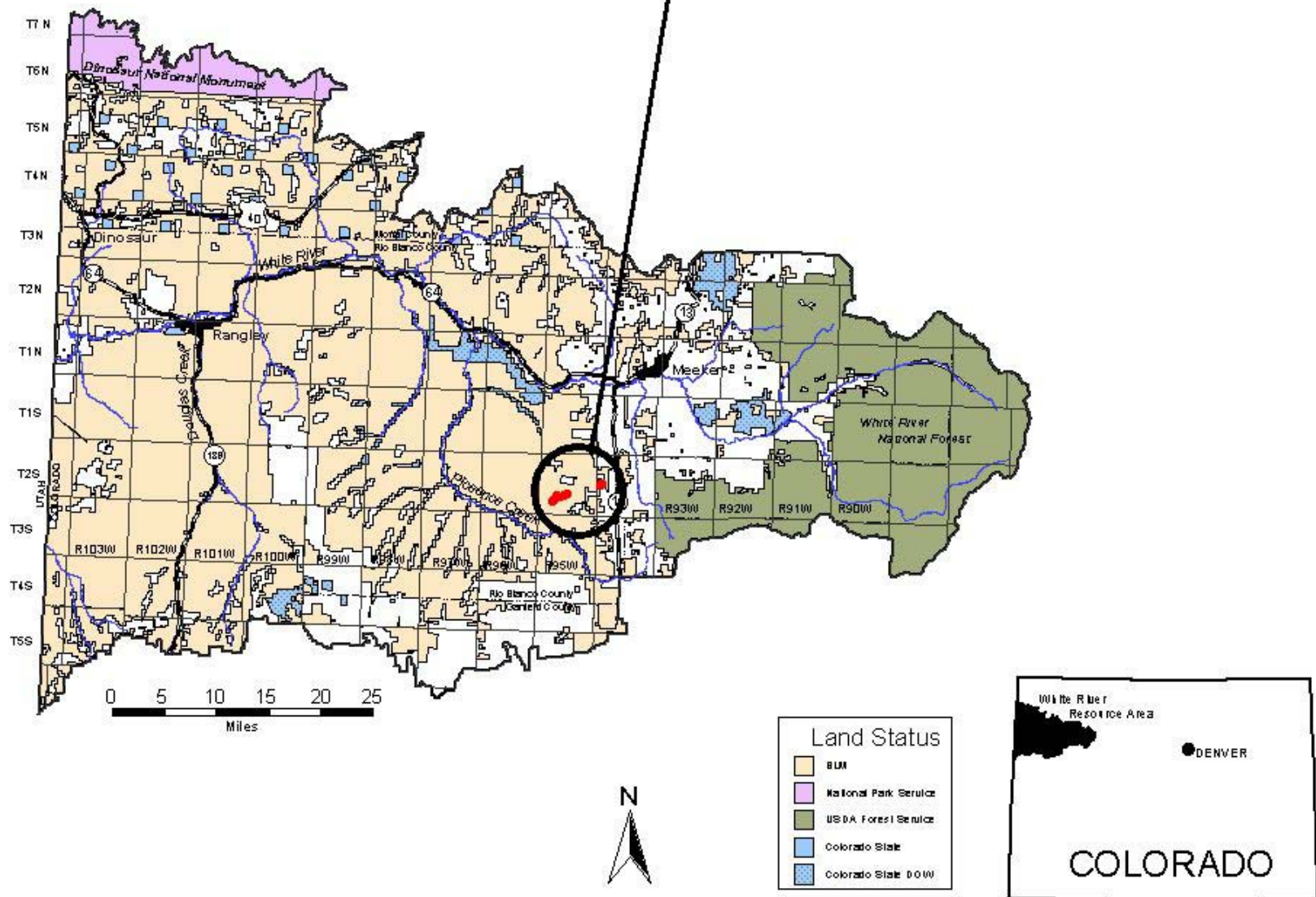
Field Manager

DATE SIGNED:

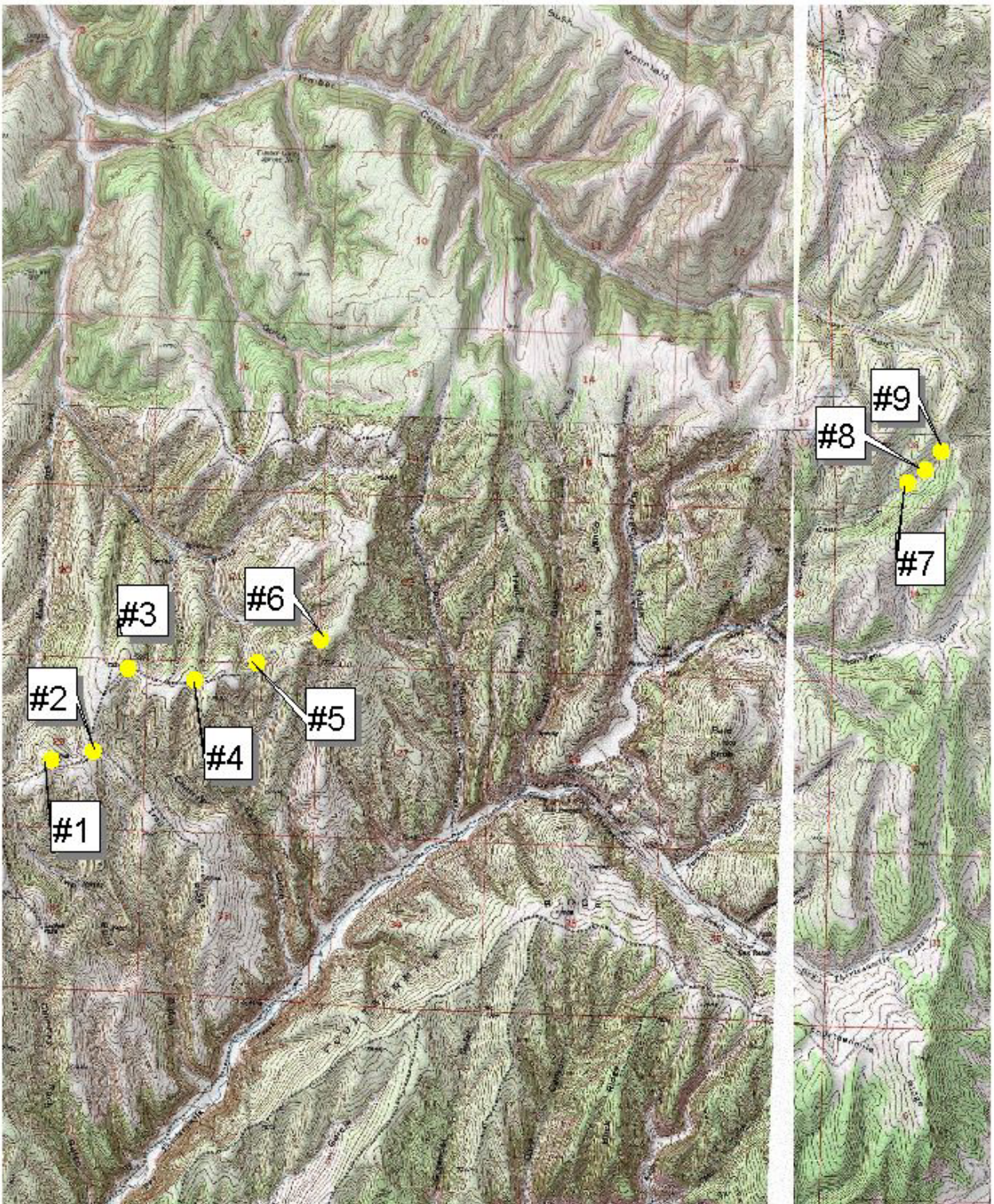
7/13/05

ATTACHMENTS: Location map of the proposed action
Proposed pond locations on 1:24,000 map

Location of Proposed Action CO-110-2005-098-EA



Little Rancho/13 Mile Pit Reservoirs



1:51235

0.25 0 0.25 0.5 Miles